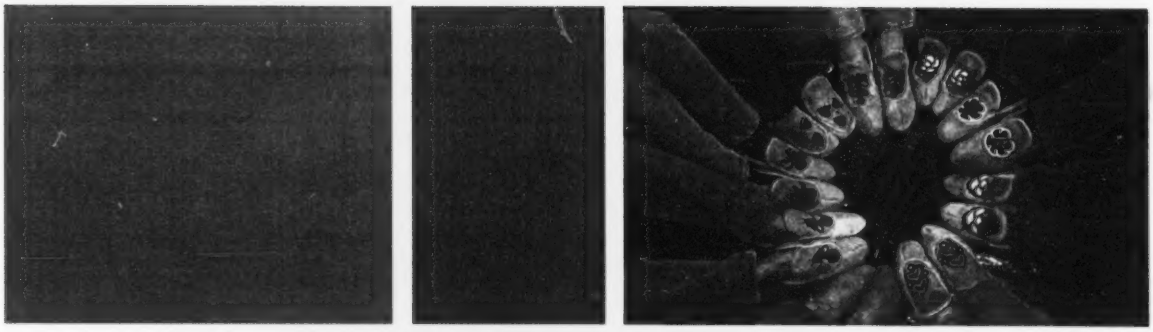

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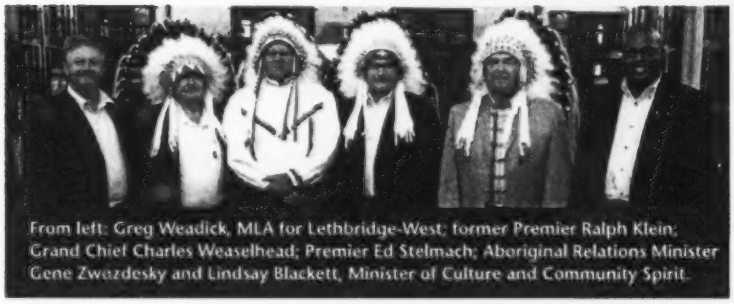
BLACKFOOT SACRED CEREMONIAL OBJECTS RETURNED

A special event held in Lethbridge in late July celebrated the return of sacred ceremonial bundles to their original owners among the Blackfoot First Nations.

Premier Ed Stelmach, Aboriginal Relations Minister Gene Zwozdesky, Culture and Community Spirit Minister Lindsay Blackett and MLA's joined Grand Chief Charles Weaselhead, Blackfoot Elders and other representatives of the Blackfoot Confederacy at the repatriation celebration. Former premier Ralph Klein also participated.

Sacred bundles are of profound cultural significance to the Blackfoot people. They are said to contain items given to the Blackfoot by the spirit beings. They are used in ceremonies to renew connections with the spirits and to seek help from the Creator. Returning sacred bundles to the communities of origin is reinvigorating many cultural and spiritual dimensions of Blackfoot life.



From left: Greg Weadick, MLA for Lethbridge-West; former Premier Ralph Klein; Grand Chief Charles Weaselhead; Premier Ed Stelmach; Aboriginal Relations Minister Gene Zwozdesky and Lindsay Blackett, Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Premier Ed Stelmach receives a gift of sweetgrass and an eagle feather from Grand Chief Weaselhead.

The sacred items had been in the Glenbow Museum in Calgary and the Royal Alberta Museum in Edmonton. To return them permanently to the Blackfoot, the Alberta government enacted the *First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act* in 2000 – the first legislation of its kind in Canada. Since then, more than 100 bundles and almost 200 sacred ceremonial objects have been repatriated to the Blackfoot and placed into active use.

During the July 30 event, Zwozdesky announced a one-time $20,000 grant to each of the three Blackfoot First Nations in Alberta - Piikani First Nation, Siksika First Nation and Blood Tribe (Kainai). The grants will support activities to enhance the preservation of Blackfoot language and culture in schools on each Blackfoot reserve.

"My Ministry recognizes that language and the oral tradition are at the heart of maintaining the Blackfoot way of life among future generations," said Zwozdesky. "Schools can use the funding for a variety of activities – buying computer software or hardware; preparing or purchasing Blackfoot language curriculum; or for field trips so students can visit museums that have Blackfoot cultural displays."

Government of Alberta ■

Aboriginal Relations

Participants in Minister Zwozdesky's Symposium Panel on Aboriginal economic development, from left, Karen (KC) Collins, Métis Nation of Alberta; Bill Hutchinson, Saskatchewan Minister of First Nations and Métis Relations; Montana First Nation Chief Carolyn Buffalo; Floyd Roland, Premier of the N.W.T.; Driftpile First Nation Chief Rose Laboucan; Gerald Cunningham, President of the Métis Settlements General Council; and Hector Goudreau, Alberta Minister of Employment and Immigration.

SYMPOSIUM GENERATES NEW ECONOMIC TOOLS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Gathering for Success, a historic three-day international symposium on Aboriginal economic development strategies that ended June 30 in Banff, will have an immediate and lasting impact on Aboriginal communities in Alberta and around the world.

The sold-out conference was the brain-child of Minister Gene Zwozdesky. Hosted by the Government of Alberta in partnership with Treaty 7 Management Corporation, it attracted more than 600 delegates including several internationally recognized speakers and experts who shared their insights and successful strategies for Aboriginal economic development.

"The conference has opened my mind to a new way of tackling economic development in Aboriginal communities," Jenny Samms, executive director of the Ministerial Task Force on Aboriginal Affairs Secretariat for the State of Victoria in Australia, wrote in one of the many letters received by the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations following the conference. "I will be bringing back to Australia many new ideas, models of best practice and new relationships."

Montana First Nation Chief Carolyn Buffalo, left, accepts a gift from symposium MC Nicole Robertson.

"Our objective was to provide opportunities for new Indigenous partnerships and that has been realized."

"Our objective was to provide opportunities for new Indigenous partnerships and that has been realized," said Chief Charles Weaselhead of the Blood Tribe, Grand Chief of Treaty 7. "This was an unprecedented forum to share international perspectives on how to increase Indigenous participation in local and global economies."

The symposium saw immediate results. A number of the conference's international delegates extended their stay in Alberta to join a study tour of First Nations and Métis communities and businesses.

A new youth engagement forum was announced to continue discussions of the 100-plus Aboriginal men and women, ages 18-29, who participated in the conference sessions and workshops designed to support the entrepreneurial spirit of the next generation of Aboriginal business leaders.

The symposium's legacy project – an online "toolkit" of web-based Aboriginal economic development information – was launched immediately following the conference. The Aboriginal Relations website is home to this growing repository of valuable resources and business contacts to help promote Aboriginal partnerships and new economic opportunities. **Visit www.aboriginal.alberta.ca.**

USING DATA TO STRENGTHEN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES - REGISTER NOW!

Statistics Canada, in partnership with Alberta's Ministry of Aboriginal Relations, is hosting Aboriginal Strategies 2009, a solutions-based conference on how data is being used in Aboriginal communities in the western provinces and northern territories.

The conference will feature five keynote speakers including Gene Zwozdesky, Alberta's Minister of Aboriginal Relations, and Doug Norris, chief demographer for Environics Analytics.

The conference, which runs Nov. 3-5 at the Westin Edmonton Hotel, will showcase successes by sharing knowledge in six thematic areas: families and youth; economic development; labour market; health and well-being; the North; and urban Aboriginal population.

Aboriginal Strategies 2009 is also a venue for Aboriginal community leaders and developers, local policy makers, decision-makers and practitioners to share strategies for using data to build vibrant sustainable communities.

More than 40 presenters will include Lewis Cardinal, president of Indigenous Media Institute; Dr. Cora Voyageur, associate professor at the University of Calgary; and Peter Dinsdale, executive director of the National Association of Friendship Centres. Register on or before Sept. 25 to receive early bird rates.

For more information, visit **www.statcan.gc.ca**, email **infostrategies@statcan.gc.ca** or call 1-888-799-0050.

EDUCATION A PRIORITY FOR NEW ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS CHIEF

Shawn Atleo, a 42-year-old regional chief from British Columbia, was elected chief of the Assembly of First Nations on July 23 after a marathon 23-hour vote.

The AFN represents more than 630 First Nations in Canada. The election was held as part of the AFN's 30th annual general assembly in Calgary, hosted by the First Nations of Treaty 7. Aboriginal Relations provided $100,000 to help sponsor the event.

"I am honoured to be chosen by our people to advocate for positive change," he said. "I had the privilege to speak and listen to hundreds of Chiefs and First Nations citizens during my campaign – Elders, youth, men and women. I now have the opportunity to act on the wisdom and guidance I received."

Atleo earned a master's degree in adult learning and global change from the University of Technology in Australia, in partnership with the University of British Columbia and schools in South Africa and Sweden.

He was installed as the first chancellor of Vancouver Island University in Nanaimo, B.C., the first Aboriginal person from that province to be named to the role.

Atleo was also the executive director of a First Nations family addictions treatment facility and managing director of a private, Aboriginal post-secondary training institute. Not surprisingly, he made improvement in First Nations education a central theme of his campaign.

It's a view he shares with Aboriginal Relations Minister Gene Zwozdesky.

"Improving the educational success of First Nations students will contribute to strong, healthy and vibrant Aboriginal communities and people, fully participating in the opportunities of a prosperous and diverse Alberta," Zwozdesky said.

Other key elements of his campaign included Treaty implementation, economic sustainability, relationship building and strengthening First Nations governments.

Atleo is the first national leader from British Columbia in 33 years. He was named "A-in-chut" and chosen as a hereditary chief of the house of Glakishpiitl of the Ahousaht First Nation in 1999.

SAFER ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES THE GOAL OF FUNDING ANNOUNCEMENTS

Five additional RCMP community police officers will begin working with the eight Métis Settlements in Alberta thanks to an enhanced policing agreement announced in June by the Government of Alberta and the Métis Settlements General Council (MSGC).

The province's Safe Communities Initiative is providing $1.77 million over three years. The federal government is contributing an additional $758,000 to the project.

"We support SafeCom and its efforts to work with Aboriginal governments and communities and the federal government to develop effective approaches to crime reduction and building safe Aboriginal communities," said Gene Zwozdesky, Minister of Aboriginal Relations. "This funding will go a considerable way to addressing the needs of at-risk community members."

This agreement provides the Settlements with RCMP officers to address issues identified by the community. Those specialized duties would be in addition to regular law enforcement by the RCMP as Alberta's provincial police service.

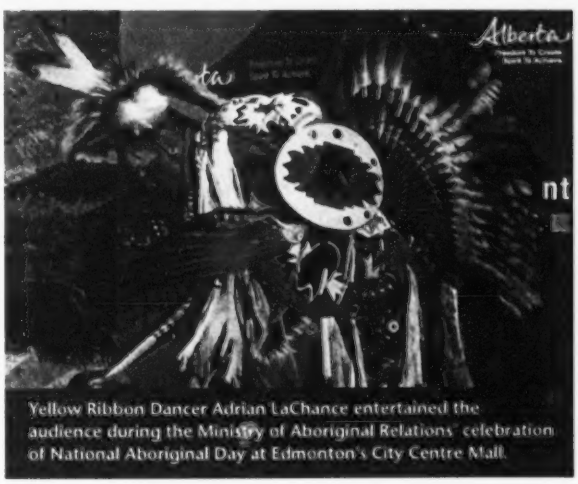
"This three-year pilot will allow the five RCMP officers to provide a more comprehensive police presence and help develop a long-term policing vision and strategy for the Métis Settlements," said Solicitor General Fred Lindsay.

In other SafeCom announcements Zwozdesky joined Children and Youth Services Minister Janis Tarchuk and Pearl Calahasen, MLA for Lesser Slave Lake, to unveil $1 million in funding for the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters to operate an outreach program. Workers will deliver family-based interventions for Aboriginal victims of family violence in the on-reserve communities of Wabasca, Morley, Maskwaci (Hobbema), Fort Chipewyan and Enilda.

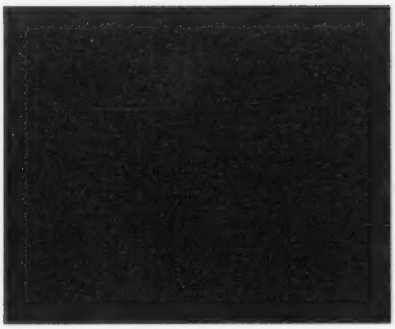
Children and Youth Services is also providing $145,000 to the Northern Haven Women's Shelter in Slave Lake for its operations and to pilot an outreach program for victims of family violence.

Calahasen announced more than $271,000 through the Children and Youth Services Community Incentive Fund for eight family violence and bullying prevention projects.

During Aboriginal Relations' celebration of National Aboriginal Day, Education Minister Dave Hancock announced $207,000 over three years from the Safe Communities Innovation Fund to support a pilot project with Edmonton Public Schools. *The Way In* initiative involves three junior high schools and community partners. Edmonton Public Schools will hire an Aboriginal Commitment Coach to work with at-risk students.



Yellow Ribbon Dancer Adrian LaChance entertained the audience during the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations' celebration of National Aboriginal Day at Edmonton's City Centre Mall.



ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY EVENTS

A sampling of Aboriginal events across Alberta

SEPT. 4-6
Nakoda Nation Labour Day Classic Powwow & Rodeo
Morley
403-881-3770

SEPT. 18
Buffy Sainte-Marie in concert
Festival Place, Sherwood Park
www.festivalplace.ab.ca

SEPT. 22-23
Guiding Circles 1 Workshop
Calgary
www.aboriginalhr.ca

SEPT. 24-26
Academic Conference: Spirituality and Health
Working Together for Optimal Health
Calgary
www.ucalgary.ca

SEPT. 29-30
Conference on Managing Water Resources & Disputes
Calgary
www.canadianinstitute.com/waterdisputes

OCT. 5-6
Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers (CANDO) Annual General Meeting
Enoch
www.edo.ca/conference

OCT. 5-8
5th Annual National Youth Panel
Enoch
www.edo.ca/conference/2009/national-youth-panel

OCT. 7-9
Niipaitapiisinni: Lifelong Learning Conference
Lethbridge
http://fnahec.org/documents/Niipaitapiisinni.pdf

OCT. 15-17
33rd Aboriginal Nurses Association of Canada Conference
Enoch
www.anac.on.ca/conference

OCT. 21
Susan Aglukark in concert
Empress Theatre, Fort Macleod
www.empresstheatre.ab.ca

OCT. 21-23
Celebrating Education Through Aboriginal Art
Lethbridge College, Lethbridge
www.lethbridgecollege.ab.ca

NOV. 3-5
Aboriginal Strategies Conference 2009
Edmonton
www.statcan.gc.ca

NOV. 22-27
First Nations Math Education (For Teachers)
Banff
www.birs.ca

NOV. 28
Heritage Through My Hands – Aboriginal Christmas Festival & Craft Fair
Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump
www.head-smashed-in.com

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